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ABSTRACT

The Bush Foundation's leadership-development programs are an important source of inservice leadership training in Minnesota. The extent to which these programs influence pre-collegiate education is explored. The paper draws on a longitudinal study that asked two basic questions: what are the long-term effects of the Bush Leadership Programs on individuals, schools, and districts? and to what extent and in what ways do participants in the current Bush Educators' Program successfully facilitate change that affects teaching and learning in their schools? The report is presented in six sections: (1) an explication of the role of school-based change projects across the Bush Leadership Development Programs (1976-present); (2) a review of the literature and concepts undergirding the Bush programs' use of school-based change projects; (3) an overview of the methods used to examine the role of the change projects in different districts; (4) survey results of the perceived impact of almost 500 of these projects in the first two Bush programs; (5) a case study of project outcomes in one small district with a high concentration of Bush graduates; and (6) the implications of these results for both leadership-development programs and for school-change efforts in general. (RJM)

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An Empirical Study of the Change Project as Both Teaching Tool and Outcome of an Educational Leadership Development Program

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An Empirical Study of the Change Project as Both Teaching Tool and Outcome of an Educational Leadership Development Program

For over twenty years, Bush Foundation-funded leadership development programs for school administrators have been an important source of in-service leadership training in Minnesota. Since 1976, these programs—the Bush Executive Fellows' Program (1976-1992), the Bush Principals' Program (1984-1994), and currently the Bush Educators' Program (1995-present)—have provided leadership training to a select group of Minnesota's educators. In annual evaluations, participants have routinely reported impressive personal and professional growth as a result of their Bush experience, and over 600 Bush alumni form a network of support for others who have completed the program.

Despite this positive reputation, however, it is not clear to what extent the outcomes of the Bush leadership development programs have actually made a difference in the course of educational improvement in the state (Patton, 1994; Baker et al., 1996). Although individual outcomes are surely important, the bottom line for the Bush programs rests in improved schooling—and ultimately improved learning—of Minnesota's pre-collegiate students. The purpose of the longitudinal study of which this paper is part is therefore to determine the extent to which these programs have actually made a difference in schools. Two questions frame the larger study, now in its third year: 1) What are the long-term effects of the Bush Leadership Programs on individuals, schools, and districts? and 2) To what extent and in what ways do participants in the current Bush Educators' Program (BEP) successfully facilitate change that significantly affects teaching and learning in their schools? This paper addresses the results of a program component that has been central to Bush leadership development since its inception in 1976: the school-based change project.

The paper consists of six sections: first, an explication of the role of the school-based change projects across the Bush Leadership Development Programs (1976-present) as both a pedagogical tool and as a program outcome; second, a brief review of the literature and concepts undergirding the Bush programs' use of school-based change projects; third, a description of the methods used to examine the role of these change projects in districts; fourth, survey results of the perceived impact of almost 500 of these projects in the first two Bush programs; fifth, a case study of project outcomes in one small district with a high concentration of Bush alumni/ae; and finally, a discussion of the implications of these results for both leadership development programs and for school change efforts more generally.

The Change Project as Pedagogical Tool and Program Outcome

In 1976, the Bush Foundation, one of Minnesota's largest private foundations, asked a professor in the business school at the University of Minnesota to create a leadership development program for a select group of the state's school superintendents. John Mauriel agreed to develop the Bush Executive Fellows' Program, a one and a half year experience that used leadership content, the case method, and faculty from major research universities around the country to hone the skills of central office administrators in the state. During the second year of Bush involvement, the program required each participant to complete a change project at his or her home district, encouraging Bush Fellows to practice their leadership skills in a real world context. Bush further funded Mauriel in 1984 to develop the Bush Principals' Program. Modeled on its predecessor, this program yearly taught a group of principals (and, over time, representative teacher leaders)

leadership skills and the means to effect change. They, too, completed a change project in their building during their second year. For several years, the two programs ran concurrently, and the network of Bush alums grew to almost 600 individuals by the mid-1990's.

Mauriel designed the Bush Programs to parallel executive training programs. Schwab's (1970) four commonplaces of learning situations point to the power of Mauriel's plan.

- The students were the presumed cream of the crop of Minnesota's educational leaders. Practicing administrators had to apply for competitive review and commit to six full weeks away from home over the course of two years (two weeks in the first summer).
- The curriculum was comprised of two components: personal development through individual assessments, the same used by companies training their executives; and professional development around issues of leadership and organizational change. From their inception, the programs emphasized and explicitly taught the existing research base in leadership, organization development, and school change, with participants engaging in detailed case discussions to hone their analytical skills. The curriculum for both central office administrators and principals was revised yearly to reflect the latest knowledge about how to effectively lead change efforts.
- The Bush faculty included well-known researchers from the business and education fields, all of whom were known to be effective teachers, and the pedagogy emphasized the Harvard case method.
- The milieu for the program was the finest resorts Minnesota could offer, with excellent food, pleasant accommodations, and enjoyable recreational opportunities. Participants routinely joked about gaining weight at Bush events. Evaluation after evaluation included comments documenting how participants appreciated the "high class treatment," for many a first in their professional career in education.

Mauriel's Bush Programs also modeled what would now be called a "learning organization." As one alumnus put it, "One of the traditions of Bush is that it is going to change." Participants completed extensive evaluation forms for each module, and outside evaluations monitored the programs' processes and perceived outcomes roughly every five years. Bush faculty and staff routinely put these results to use, allowing the programs to continually evolve. Given these components, there could be no doubt that Mauriel and his colleagues sought to create through the Bush Programs powerful learning experiences for their participants.

Although evaluations throughout the program's history were invariably positive, Michael Quinn Patton noted in his study (Patton, 1994) that the translation of a reportedly profound personal experience into meaningful change in the participants' schools or districts could not be documented. This was not a surprise given the nature of the programs through 1994, which required a project of some sort, but did not highly structure what that might be. The program timeline seemed to encourage a completed project after two years, limiting the scope of what most people attempted.

A revision of the two original programs resulted in the new Bush Educators' Program (BEP), an updated and unified program for 24 educators per year who serve a variety of roles. A total of four cohorts will participate in BEP before the program receives its final funding.{1} The BEP, a six week commitment over two years, emphasizes the importance of cross-role team-building and collaboration for long-term change and places special emphasis on the Educators' change projects in the hopes of stimulating and supporting meaningful innovation in Minnesota schools.

The Bush Program consists of three phases. In Phase I, participants are introduced to an overview of key issues in educational change coupled with extensive personal assessment in order

to understand individual leadership styles, strengths, and areas of needed improvement. Phase I consists of two weeks of training plus two, two-day meetings, one including the participants' superintendents or school board chairs. Phase II consists of an intensive experience in one district in which BEP participants serve as external data collectors and consultants on a major change issue This phase lasts two weeks. Finally, in Phase III, participants begin to more formally design and then implement their change projects, which are intended to result in meaningful change in their own districts. Phase III consists of three, two-day, off-site meetings during the school year in which the Bush participant brings a leadership team to work on the school-based project.

A Review of Literature

In an analysis of the problems associated with professional development programs for administrators, Murphy and Hallinger (1987) state that "...the lack of research on the impact of administrative actions on organizational outcomes is difficult to explain. Not surprisingly, given this research void, remarkably little content in training programs is based on administrator effects on organizational outcomes" (p. 254). However, we are in the initial stages of identifying a model that would identify the specific components of the Bush Programs most likely to effect positive change.

The evolving Critical Bush Components Model (CBCM) includes what we believe to be distinctive program elements that lead over time to documentable changes both in the leadership behavior of individual participants and in organizational changes in the schools and districts where they work. Seven elements, grounded in two rounds of focus group data and survey data from almost 500 Bush participants, also find support in the educational leadership and adult learning literatures: 1) use of a cohort; 2) active learning approaches; 3) experiential learning, including direct involvement in change efforts; 4) a leisure component; 5) networking opportunities; 6) reflection; and 7) mentoring by both peers and expert faculty.

These seven program elements are listed as instructional mechanisms in Figure 1. We hypothesize that the impact of each component is unavoidably mediated by the individual characteristics of the Bush participant and by the ever-changing societal context in which the program operates; yet, through exploiting these facets of the program, individuals become better leaders and more effective change-agents.

The CBCM assumes that Phases I and II will result in changes in individuals' leadership skills, confidence, and so forth. Survey data collected during the 1996-1997 school year on all 572 surviving Bush alumni (70% response rate) support this assertion. For example, respondents were asked to indicate the top three areas from a list of possible response categories in which they gained the most from their Bush experience. The top category consisted of 43% of respondents stating that they gained leadership and training skills. For another question, respondents were asked to state the one major effect participating in the Bush program had on them. Sixty-three percent stated that they had increased confidence.

The CBCM further assumes that these positive changes in individual participants will enable them to successfully undertake a change project in their district. Thus, in Phase III, Bush participants develop, plan, and begin to implement their change project using what they learned in Phases I and II. The CBCM then proposes that these change projects will lead to changed schools (as well as contributing further to the skills and knowledge of the individuals) and, ultimately, to changes in education in the state of Minnesota. In fact, the main premise of the Bush program is that well-trained school leaders will be able to understand, respond to, and adapt their school

districts' strategies to external and internal factors. As a result, the delivery of public education will be more effective and efficient.

The use of projects in training programs is not unique to the Bush Programs (Fulmer & Vicere, 1996; Kur & Bunning, 1996; Murphy & Hallinger, 1987; Peterson, 1987; Tichy & DeRose, 1995), nor is the idea that the use of projects should foster organizational and individual change as part of the overall impact of the training program. However, systematic evaluations of the impact of change projects on organizations are lacking. Pitner (1987) claims that "the tendency is to evaluate training in terms of participant's [sic] feelings and attitudes toward the program or the comfort level of the facilities" (p. 39), rather than to evaluate the impact on the individual or organization.

A review of the literature on executive training programs in business found that several executive leadership development programs are now using an active learning component in which participants identify and work on projects in their work setting while taking part in the training program (Fulmer & Vicere, 1996; Kur & Bunning, 1996). In fact, Tichy and DeRose (1995) claim that "the most effective leadership development programs have three key ingredients," one of which is "real business projects [that] put participants at risk as they apply what they learn" (no page given). For example, a program for executive leadership development called TTL (three-track leadership) has, as one of its tracks, a business track in which "participants conduct complex, strategically critical business projects" (Kur & Bunning, 1996, no page given). Several descriptive examples of the types of projects that have been undertaken by participants in TTL are provided (Kur & Bunning, 1996).

However, although business training programs may be incorporating experiential learning in the form of "real" projects undertaken in the "real" work setting, when outcomes are discussed it is usually in terms of the impact on the individual or of the return on the investment of sending an individual through a training program (Fulmer & Vicere, 1996). Thus, although using experiential learning seems to be an acknowledged practice in business training programs, little information is provided about the effect of these projects on the organization (beyond financial impact), nor is much information provided about how to evaluate their effect. Unfortunately, the literature on educational training programs is not much better at providing information about the effects of a project as part of a training program or on how to best evaluate outcomes in the organization.

Murphy and Hallinger (1987) outlined some of the problems with the then current professional development programs for administrators (in the late 1980s) and presented their thoughts on what components are necessary in such programs. They mention the need for better instruction, which includes incorporating experiential learning components into these programs. Murphy and Hallinger state that "as Moyle and Andrews...point out, our instructional technology should be geared more toward translating theory into practice. More and better use of clinically based field experiences, school improvement projects...are needed" (p. 256). However, they also point out that the impact and effects of these new components must be assessed. Levine, Barth, and Haskins (1987) acknowledge that "determining the impact of an educational intervention in practice is one of the most difficult evaluation tasks" (p. 157).

In an example of a leadership development program using these "new" philosophies, Peterson (1987) describes the Principals' Institute of Vanderbilt University, which is an inservice professional development program for principals. "By employing a research-based, theoretically driven program, it expects to change the ways administrators and prospective administrators conceive of their work, behave on the job, and improve their schools through leadership" (p. 213). During the first summer, participants in the Principals' Institute meet for a two-week intensive

course of study in which they are trained in leadership skills. As part of this two-week program, each principal develops a yearlong school improvement project to be conducted during the upcoming school year. Participants can also attend an optional advanced institute the following summer. Similar to the Bush Programs, the implied theory of action in the Principals' Institute of Vanderbilt University is that improved leadership skills will lead to improved job behavior and changes in the organization; however, it is presumed that this has not been tested systematically because no results were provided. That is, although some of these projects were described, no assessment of the impact of these projects on either individuals or schools was provided.

A leadership development program closely aligned with the Bush Program is the Chief Executive Officer Leadership Development Program (CEOLDP), which was developed by the Center for Creative Leadership, based in Greensboro, North Carolina. The CEOLDP is a one-year program for school superintendents. The program consists of a one-week classroom program followed by a follow-up year on the job in which superintendents implement learning projects while under the supervision and mentorship of an executive facilitator. As part of a larger evaluation of the CEOLDP leadership program, McCauley and Hughes-James (1994) were interested in assessing internal changes in the superintendents as well as changes in their organizations. One of the methods used to assess the effects of this leadership program included an end-of-program interview in which superintendents were asked about the impact of the program overall, as well as specific learning components of the program (e.g., the classroom portion, the learning projects, and so forth), on both the individual and his/her school system.

In terms of the impact of the leadership program on the school system, two of the three factors listed involved the learning projects. For example, the superintendents mentioned "the positive outcomes of their learning projects (e.g., most students and staff using computer technology, a comprehensive plan is in place...)" (p. 23), as well as "how their projects and achievement of goals were more successful because of the program" (p. 23). Overall, "for most of the superintendents and facilitators, the success of their projects was not one of the most important outcomes..." (p. 25), a finding common to Bush (see below); however, "when asked directly about changes in the organization, learning projects were a major theme" (p. 25). This study provides some information about the value of learning projects as a component of leadership development programs, not only for the individual but for the organization.

In summary, then, attempting to systematically assess and report on the effects of the school-based change project on not only individuals, but more importantly on schools, is not well-documented in the literature. Although other leadership development programs also assume that their training will impact both the individual and the organization, as does the CBCM, this study specifically addresses and reports on the effects of the school-based change project at the organizational level, as well as at the individual level.

Methods

The project's overall research design couples qualitative and quantitative methods to examine what happened to the participants, schools, and districts from the original Executive Fellows' and Principals' Programs and to those participating in the revised Bush Educators' Program. The data reported in the current paper come from three primary sources: 1) content analysis of existing archival project data (which are minimal) and the curriculum of the current BEP; 2) the results of project-related items in last year's survey of all surviving Bush alumni/ae (see King & Kistler, 1997 for a description of the methodology); and 3) an initial case study of the outcomes of Bush projects

in one district with an extremely high concentration of program participants (a small district with nine alums--seven administrators and two teacher leaders), testing the assumption that the more people in a district who have experienced Bush, the more likely a district will change. A two-phase process generated qualitative data about the district and Bush participants' work within it:

- In May, 1997, the seven Bush alums then working in the district were invited to participate in a group discussion of their district's history since 1976 (when the Bush program began) and of their experience in the program. Six attended the afternoon session that generated a 20-year timeline of key events along with a list of their change projects and the ways the Bush program "might have made a difference" in the district.
- In March, 1998, we conducted individual interviews (30 minutes to an hour in length) with five of the alumni/alumnae still working in the district in order to obtain a more detailed description of their Bush projects and the perceived effects of the program.{2} People interviewed were sent field note summaries and asked to suggest any changes; two people made corrections.

In addition, an ongoing review of this project's results by Bush faculty and a group of interested alumni/alumnae helps us make sense of our findings.

Survey Item Results

As an initial step in our overall study of the outcomes of the Bush programs, we conducted focus group interviews with randomly selected alumni/alumnae, seeking to identify their perceptions of what distinguished their Bush experience and its outcomes. In responding to the question, "What areas did you gain the most from in your Bush experience?" respondents did not identify the Bush change project as a critical area. In fact, in a rank ordering of all responses given to that question, it was rated 10th out of 21 areas, which suggests that alums found it useful perhaps, but not most valuable.

King and Kistler (1997) detail the results of a survey, which was developed based on the focus group results, of almost 500 Bush alumni/alumnae from the first two Bush programs. In an open-ended item asking for the one major effect of their Bush experience, only 2% (8 people) listed the Bush project, pointing again to the minor impact of the project in the eyes of the alumni/alumnae. Later in the survey, however, all respondents were directly asked to rate the perceived value of their change projects by answering the following question:

> To what extent do you agree with or disagree with the following statements? Please use the scale to respond (where *1=Strongly Disagree* and *5=Strongly Agree*).
>
> 1. The project was a good way to apply concepts and skills taught at Bush.
> 2. The project made a substantial impact at the project site.
> 3. The project was a stepping stone for other projects or efforts.
> 4. My Bush project would not have been done had I not attended Bush.
> 5. The project still exists in some form at the project site.

Not surprisingly, all of these statements were rated highly, with a mean rating of 3.5. Both the Executive Fellows (EF) and the Bush Principals (BP) rated Statement 1 the highest (EF = 3.83; BP = 4.1), followed by Statement 4 for the Executive Fellows (3.72) and Statement 5 for the Bush Principals (4.08).{3}

Using a criterion of a difference of at least 0.5, respondents in the two programs differed on two items: Item 2, rating substantial impact (3.65 for EF; 4.04 for BP), and Item 5, reporting that the project is still in existence (3.61 for EF; 4.08 for BP). Neither of these responses is surprising given that principals may well have been able to make a more substantial impact at their project site

(i.e., their building, as opposed to the district office in which a central office person works) and that most principals completed their Bush program far more recently than the bulk of Executive Fellow alumni/alumnae. We should note that over 100 each of the Executive Fellows and Bush Principals alums indicated their willingness to be interviewed on the telephone about their projects.

A Bush-Intensive District Case Study

A review of the list of Bush alumni/alumnae yielded several districts with a high number of administrators and teacher leaders who had completed a Bush program at some point in the program's history. As noted above, one district in particular--Willow Falls--stood out because it was fairly small (an enrollment around 1,200 students) and yet had nine individuals participate in Bush, eight of them in close chronological proximity (1985-1994). In simplest terms, the status of the nine Willow Falls Bush alums is as follows: two are now retired (one in June, 1997); one, a former superintendent, currently works in another state; and the remaining alums serve in various roles in the district—business manager, curriculum director, high school principal, elementary principal, high school teacher, and middle school teacher (recently certified as a principal).

The participants' descriptions of their Bush projects point to a direct effect on change in Willow Falls and to the role of the Bush leaders in facilitating that change. Some examples are small; for example, the curriculum director noted, "One Board member I took to a Bush event still talks about it years later." But consider several stories that point to more important changes in the district. The first involves the high school principal, who worked in a smaller district during the time he participated in Bush. His project was to develop an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP), which was modeled after the special education IEP, for every student in the high school he administered. At that district, resources for professional development were few, and the ILP "was implemented in a hit or miss fashion" at best.

When he moved to Willow Falls in 1989, however, he brought the ILP project with him and, using his knowledge of school reform that was honed at Bush, introduced structural changes—a homeroom period, advisor-advisee relationships, and additional teacher planning time—to support the ILP process. The ILP process was introduced once these structures were in place, and teachers by and large accepted it. As he noted, "When you're new, you have a honeymoon period because people are usually ready for a change and will do things for you during that time that they wouldn't have done otherwise...Bush let me take my dream and follow it."

This principal, a recent winner of a Milliken Foundation award, was also influential in two of his colleagues' Bush projects. Several years after the ILP implementation began, a teacher leader in his building attended Bush and built her Bush project—to design a four year student portfolio—explicitly on the existing ILP process. As she put it, her project was to figure out "what goes into [the portfolio] and how to keep it going and manage it [over four years, grades 9-12]." She first conducted focus groups with parents, community business people, and post-secondary educators to determine their thoughts on the use of portfolios. Then, with the principal's support, she introduced the changes in the ILP process that would lead to the new student portfolios.

In her words, "The project didn't get started very well" because the activities necessary to generate the portfolio materials were ungraded and not part of an academic class. Within two years, however, the ninth grade social studies teachers agreed to require portfolio development as part of their curriculum on careers, economics, and learning styles. The graded materials were sent to homeroom teachers, and students' portfolios took shape. The Bush teacher acknowledges that there is still resistance to the process, especially as new staff are hired who have not experienced

the common trainings, but she also points out that many teachers are now "more in tune with saying, 'This is good, send it to your homeroom teacher for your portfolio.'" She also acknowledges the importance of the principal's continuing understanding and support (e.g., the school pays for the portfolio notebooks).

The high school principal was also influential in bringing another Bush project to life. When the curriculum director attended the Bush Executive Fellows Program, Willow Falls was experiencing a growing number of students who were not succeeding in the traditional school structure. As a result, her Bush project was to design a research-based Alternative Learning Center (ALC) to serve these students in nontraditional ways by offering a special curriculum from noon to 6:00 p.m. She and the principal calculated that by keeping an additional 10 students in school, the new ALC program would be cost effective, and the Board approved the project. The district's financial situation that year, however, required fairly drastic budget cuts, and, as she put it, "My project wasn't going anywhere." Seven years later, when a new source of state funding became available, the principal hauled out the original plan, modified it to meet the funding requirements, and put it in place. As the principal puts it, "The Bush project lent some authenticity because the idea had already been well researched." The earlier planning as part of the Bush project was not wasted, but formed the basis of the eventual program.

Two Bush projects at the Willow Falls Middle School created first the house concept within the school and second, interdisciplinary teams within the houses. As was the case in the high school, the school's principal was the first Bush participant, and, with his encouragement, a teacher leader followed shortly in his footsteps. The principal laid the groundwork by introducing the middle school concept, dividing the student population into instructional groups, and explicitly working to improve staff morale. When the time came for his teacher leader's project, he supported it both visibly and behind the scenes. As she described it, "My project never would have happened without [the principal]. He'd been through Bush and knew what I was going through." He was "an avid supporter and my toughest critic," willing to provide time within the school day for her to work with her leadership group or to convince reluctant teachers.

The most dramatic incident in the school's development occurred halfway through the second Bush project. For financial reasons, the school board privately discussed plans for building a new K-7 school and moving the eighth grade to the high school, effectively ending any possibility of a viable middle grades program. Led by the Bush participants, the middle grades faculty lobbied the board to build a different new school, one that would serve sixth through eighth graders. The result: Three years later, a brand new middle school with architecture appropriate to the house concept and interdisciplinary teaming opened in Willow Falls, which was directly attributable, in the teacher's opinion, to Bush leadership training.

The results? Although she is quick to point to areas needing improvement, this Bush alumna can identify clear successes: more innovative teaching, flex scheduling, teachers are having more fun, parents are getting more frequent contacts from teachers, and so on. One indirect result she mentioned, reaffirmed by the other teacher alumna, was that the program taught teachers "to empathize with principals and trust them" and vice versa for the administrators.

As a side note, a final example suggests a different type of effect resulting from a Bush project; that is, providing information of value to similar districts. At the time he attended Bush, the business manager was superintendent of a small district facing possible consolidation with two or three nearby districts, a process called "pairing and sharing" in Minnesota at that time. The districts' fears centered in large part upon what would happen to businesses in the communities if they lost their high schools. Given these fears, the then superintendent's Bush project took a fairly

academic turn; he developed and administered a survey of business leaders in communities that had recently consolidated to determine what actually happened to commerce in small towns that lost their high schools. His data suggested that as long as the town had an elementary school and ongoing associated activities, business did not suffer. Although he found the project useful to his own district, he reported being rather surprised when the State Department of Education requested a copy of the results and used them to allay fears when visiting other districts. He also received at least 10 requests for copies of the survey from Minnesota superintendents and other requests from North Dakota.

The Willow Falls interviews point to two overall themes relating to participants' learnings from the Bush projects. First, as mentioned above, the two teacher leaders stated unequivocally that their projects were successful due to their principals' understanding of change, learned through the Bush process:

> "My principal has a framework for [change] and that made it easier to come back and implement my project. I had support back home."
>
> "[My principal] let me have a leadership role and gave up autonomy. I don't think he would have done that without Bush."

The continuing support the principals provided—freeing the teachers to work on the project, meeting with others, verbally supporting the effort—is evident in the brief project histories. In each case, the principal gave the teacher the opportunity to lead and vigorously supported her efforts to do so.

Second, all of those interviewed discussed how their projects helped them to understand the change process firsthand. There were three parts to this understanding: 1) the shared Bush experience creating common knowledge and trust; 2) specific skills useful to the change process; and 3) awareness that change takes time and that the program provides the opportunity to practice these skills in real time. The Bush alums talked about the commonality of their Bush experience and their common knowledge of change as a group:

> "We can communicate on another level."
>
> "We have something in common as a team: we understand change efforts."
>
> "[We share] mostly an understanding of what we went through and what we did, an acceptance."
>
> "There's a respect that's there. We learned a lot in 18 months. You were in Bush and know what others have learned."

The curriculum director emphasized the ultimate lesson of Bush that the Willow Falls alums share: "Have we always been successful? No, but that hasn't kept us from continuing."

Those interviewed also discussed specific skills garnered during their Bush involvement: "the importance of working together to accomplish something"; "[the importance of] going out to parents and other groups"; "how to work with different constituents to get something passed"; and "[the need to] listen and understand others' points of view so [it's] not just one person doing it." The following quotations demonstrate an awareness of the challenges facing those who propose change in a school:

> "I learned patience and how long it takes to change something important. Change is not a product, but a process."
>
> "Bush tactics helped us pass the referendum because we knew how to do focus groups, to focus on the positive, how to deal with the press, how to hold community meetings, and so on."

A final area of understanding related to the fact that the Bush programs at that time extended over 18 months, far longer than other inservice leadership development programs then available.{4} As one person put it,

> "[The] length of the program allows you to do things you can't do in three to five days...Long-range change can't take place without the follow-up that goes behind it. Bush allows for this follow-up."

Another noted, "This is the only program I've been in that has long-term impacts, and the project is the key, to actually take what we have learned and do it." The second theme—a shared experience and knowledge base, specific skills related to change, and a timeframe that enabled participants to practice these skills—documents powerful lessons from the earlier Bush programs.

Implications for Leadership Development and for School Change Efforts

One of the challenges facing in-service leadership development programs is how to effect meaningful change in schools. Many programs operate on the assumption that by making leaders more effective—whatever that might mean—schools will eventually improve. Given the multiple challenges of such work, few programs claim responsibility for or pay attention to the actual effect of their leaders' actions in a school or district context. Since 1976, the Bush Leadership Development Programs have required participants to conduct a school change project as part of their learning experience, and the current Bush Educators' Program has made this a central component. This study attempted to study the effect of the school-based change project both on individual participants, but more specifically on their organizations.

This paper has documented the evolution of the school change project across 21 years of teaching in the Bush programs. In the 25 cohorts of the older programs (16 Executive Fellows and 9 Principals) the final project was not a major emphasis. People completed projects, but they were seen as a requirement, not necessarily as an important indicator of Bush program success. By contrast, the current Bush Educators' Program has challenged participants to use their projects to tackle significant change efforts.

From the survey data, it is clear that participants feel that the change project is a useful way to apply what they learned in Phases I and II of the Bush program and that their project would not have been done if they had not attended Bush. For many participants, their project still exists in some form at their project site, and, in districts with a high concentration of Bush participants, projects sometimes interacted in helpful ways. Thus, the survey data indicate that a school-based change project is a useful program component.

Based on our survey data and the case study results, we suggest that if a leadership development program's theory of action assumes that organizations will change as a result of using a school-based change project as a program component, then the project must be made an important part of the program (i.e., a component of the program that is highly stressed). As such, the emphasis on the change project has evolved over the years in the Bush Program, and currently the program stresses that the project should be geared toward long-term change (rather than a project that can be completed during the time the participant is a member of the Bush program). Further evaluations of the Bush Leadership Programs will attempt to assess whether the assertion made above (that this component should be emphasized more heavily to provide greater impact at the site) is logical.

The length of the Bush Programs (up to a two-year commitment) contributes to the success of the program in general, and to the success of the school-based projects more specifically. Participants work on their projects during Phase III of the program, during which time they still

have the support of their Bush cohort, expert faculty, continued access to knowledge and skills, and so forth. Most of the other leadership programs described in the literature provide a training piece and then send the participants back to their job sites with a project. However, the participants are often not provided with much guidance once they return to their site. This sometimes results in projects getting set aside for what are seen as more pressing issues or the leader returning to previous ways of acting and behaving. Thus, leadership development programs should incorporate projects as part of the training, so that while tackling their projects the leaders have the support of the leadership program.

The case study results also suggest that leaders working together at the same school have an enhanced ability to accomplish change efforts. A synergy seems to be created in which leaders can work behind the scenes for each other and interact to make the change happen. This comes in part from the shared experience and common knowledge that the leaders obtain from the leadership program (in our case, from their Bush experience). The case study of Willow Falls demonstrates this at the school building-level to a large extent and at the district-level to a smaller extent. An implication for leadership development programs, or maybe more importantly for school buildings or districts, is that it is useful to send a variety of leaders (superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders) from the same building or district to leadership development programs so that they can better appreciate other leaders in their buildings or districts and work together for change.

A final question still unanswered is a methodological one. Although changes in individuals and schools are a desired outcome of leadership development programs, the reason much of this is undertaken is ultimately to improve student achievement. Establishing the link between program components and individual outcomes or school outcomes has proven to be difficult enough, let alone trying to establish the link one step further to student achievement. We believe that this paper has established the link between a specific program component, the school-based change project, and changes in schools. Of course, we also believe that the other components of the Bush Program are essential for successfully undertaking the school-based change project. A next, important step will be to link changes in leadership skills and schools to changes (hopefully, improvement) in student achievement.

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Footnotes

[1]Twenty-three BEP I participants completed their formal involvement in June, 1997. BEP II (24 participants) began in March, 1996; BEP III (24 participants) in March, 1997; and BEP IV (24 participants) in March, 1998.

[2]A third phase is yet to take place in which we will use the three people who no longer work in the district—either because they have retired or have moved elsewhere—to confirm the findings to date. Two of these individuals served as superintendent and the other as a long-term principal, and we look forward to their responses to the data.

[3]Because we surveyed the entire population of Bush alumni/alumnae, statistical significance tests are not applicable.

[4]The revised BEP is even longer, running from March of one year and extending for two full years until June of the second year.

Figure 1
Critical Bush Components Model